



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Pacific
Southwest
Region

Regional Office, R5
1323 Club Drive
Vallejo, CA 94592
(707) 562-8737 Voice
(707) 562-9240 Text (TDD)

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Dear Valued Stakeholder:

As “early adopters” of the 2012 Planning Rule, the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests will revise their land and resource management plans (forest plans), as amended. The existing forest plans have been amended several times since their approval, including the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment. We are beginning the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and analysis to revise these plans. This letter announces the start of the scoping period. The three early adopter forests are located primarily in the southern Sierra Nevada range in California, with some of the Inyo National Forest in the Great Basin and extending into Nevada. They encompass approximately 4.5 million acres and are administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service (see the enclosed location map).

For the Sequoia National Forest, the Giant Sequoia National Monument Management Plan (Monument Plan), which amended the Sequoia Forest Plan in 2012, continues to govern management of the portion of the Sequoia National Forest located within the Giant Sequoia National Monument (Monument). The Monument Plan is a subset of the entire forest plan. The purpose of the current forest plan revision is to revise management direction for the rest of the forest outside of the Monument. The 1990 Mediated Settlement Agreement to the Sequoia National Forest Land Management Plan (MSA) states, “In the interim period between signing this Agreement and finalizing an amendment incorporating this Agreement into the Plan [Forest Plan], the Parties agree that the provisions of this Agreement shall be implemented according to the schedules indicated throughout this document.” A review was conducted to determine which of the provisions of the MSA have already been incorporated into amendments to the 1988 Sequoia Forest Plan. This review found that there are a number of provisions yet to be fully incorporated in amendments. Therefore, applicable provisions of the MSA will be addressed in the environmental analysis for forest plan revision.

Background

As directed by the National Forest Management Act, the Forest Service is preparing revised forest plans for the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests under the 2012 Planning Rule. This plan revision requires preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). The Forest Service will prepare one EIS for the three national forests currently undergoing plan revision. The three forests share some landscapes, issues, and stakeholders. Consolidating in one EIS will help streamline the process for many stakeholders and help facilitate a



landscape-level approach to plan revision. We expect that one EIS will also help the agency complete plan revision within a reasonable timeframe and budget.

Although there will be one EIS for the three national forests, three separate forest plans will be produced, one for each national forest. Forest supervisors are the responsible officials for development and approval of forest plan revisions consistent with the direction and intent of the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219).

The Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests will revise their forest plans to provide a framework for integrated resource management for the forest. The forest plans will guide future management activities toward desired conditions on the three national forests (for the Sequoia, only outside of the Monument). These revised plans will define the parameters for management activities. They will offer the flexibility to adapt project-level decisions to accommodate rapidly changing resource conditions.

Purpose and Need

The National Forest Management Act and its implementing regulations contained in Chapter 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 219 (36 CFR 219), require that each national forest in the National Forest System have a land management plan that provides a framework for integrated resource management and for guiding project and activity decision-making. According to the National Forest Management Act, forest plans are to be revised on a 10- to 15-year cycle. The current forest plans for the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests were approved between 1988 and 1992 and are due for revision.

We have used science-based assessments and considered public and employee input to identify needed changes to existing forest plan direction. We have identified the following areas where changes are needed:

Benefits to People and Communities

- There is a need to update plan direction to: support the long term sustainability of forest benefits to people and contributions to local economies, which come as a result of the many uses of National Forest System lands; to encourage the use of partnerships with private and public entities and tribal stewardship opportunities; and to improve communication and outreach to the public, including underrepresented populations.
- There is a need to update plan direction to move toward resilience of forests to climate change and fire, ensuring that they provide benefits to people.
- There is a need to modify plan components to maintain levels of forest product and biomass production that support an economically-viable forest products industry, and to encourage local hiring.

Tribal Relations and Uses

- There is a need to include plan direction regarding tribal relations and uses to: help tribes maintain their culture and connection to the land; support economic opportunities in tribal communities; incorporate traditional ecological knowledge; and collaborate with the agency to meet restoration goals.

Sustainable Recreation

- There is a need to update plan direction to improve recreation facilities, settings, opportunities and access and their sustainability; and to improve and protect scenic character, which contributes to people's recreation experience and sense of place.
- There is a need to proactively manage cultural resources to protect and improve the conditions of these resources and help connect people to the land.

Fire

- There is a need to add plan direction to improve fire management to recognize climate change.
- There is a need to modify wildfire management areas and associated plan direction to increase the area where fuel reduction treatments occur, while also increasing the opportunity to use fire as a restoration tool, and to modify plan direction to maintain or restore fire as an ecosystem process, especially in riparian areas.
- There is a need to include plan direction that incorporates analyzing smoke tradeoffs to communities from prescribed fire or wildfire used to meet resource objectives and large, uncontrolled wildfire.

Ecological Integrity

- There is a need to add plan direction to improve resilience of ecosystems to climate change.
- There is a need to modify plan direction to: increase the rate and extent of the land area where vegetation is being restored, decreasing the threat of large, undesirable fires; to sustain and increase local capacity to restore vegetation and reduce fuels; to add and modify plan direction specific to ecological integrity of eastside ecosystems that occur on the Inyo National Forest and small portions of the Sequoia National Forest; and to include plan direction for old forest, early seral habitat and subalpine and alpine systems.
- There is a need to modify plan direction for terrestrial ecosystems and fire, as described above, to increase the ability of forests to store and sequester carbon.
- There is a need to modify plan direction for aquatic and riparian ecosystems to maintain or improve the resilience of these ecosystems to climate change, fire, air pollution and invasive species, and to manage meadows holistically across individual resource areas, such as hydrology, soils, wildlife and vegetation.
- There is a need to identify in the plans watersheds that are a priority for restoration, and to modify plan direction to improve groundwater storage and to address water shortages and climate change in riparian systems.
- There is a need to modify plan direction to improve ecological conditions for the California spotted owl and to restore and maintain greater sage-grouse habitat on the Inyo National Forest. There is a need to incorporate new information and conservation practices into plan direction to contribute to the recovery of federally-listed species (including candidates and proposed) and to streamline project planning.
- There is a need to modify plan direction to prevent the establishment and spread of invasive species.

Lands

- There is a need to incorporate lands acquired by the Inyo National Forest through the Nevada Enhancement Act into the forest plan.

Designated Areas

- There is a need to: review existing plan direction for existing and recommended wilderness to determine if any updates are needed; to review existing plan direction for wild and scenic rivers to determine if any updates are needed; to include a management area for the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail corridor and associated management direction; and to include management direction for national recreation trails.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to revise the existing forest plans for the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests, as amended, to address the needed changes. Desired conditions, strategies, standards, and guidelines have been developed to address the need to change areas. The detailed proposed action for the items that need to change is enclosed and can also be found on the Forest Plan Revision webpage at: <http://tinyurl.com/r5earlyadopters>. Though these needed changes are the primary drivers for revising these three forest plans, there will be other changes that occur. Existing plan direction that does not need to change will be converted as necessary to meet the definitions in the 2012 Planning Rule and will be brought forward into the revised plans. Some existing direction will necessarily be changed from one type of direction to another. Plan direction that is no longer needed because it duplicates or is in conflict with existing law, regulation, or policy; no longer applies; sets tasks that have been completed; or refer to timeframes that are now past will not be carried forward into the revised forest plans.

Management Areas

Under the 2012 Planning Rule, management areas and geographic areas replace what was previously known as land allocations, management areas, and management prescriptions. The suitability of areas for uses and resource management activities will be determined, including identifying those lands suited for timber production.

Designated Areas

Wilderness: For currently designated wilderness areas, existing management direction is being reviewed to determine if additional updates are needed. There may be new recommendations that result from the wilderness evaluations currently underway. More information on the wilderness inventory and evaluation process, including maps and instructions for providing feedback, can be found online at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/r5/FPRWilderness>. Feedback submitted through this site will be used to inform the wilderness evaluations and are not considered formal scoping comments. The identification and evaluation of areas recommended for wilderness will be included as an appendix in the draft EIS for plan revision, and will be available for public review during the draft EIS comment period. If you have comments related to wilderness that you would like considered as part of scoping, please follow the instructions laid out below under the section “Public Comment Opportunity.”

Wild and Scenic Rivers: The 66 miles of the San Joaquin, South Fork San Joaquin, North Fork San Joaquin, and Middle Fork San Joaquin River that the Sierra National Forest found suitable in previous planning efforts will continue to be managed as suitable and recommended wild and scenic river segments until such time as Congress designates them as additions to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. One mile of the south Fork Kern River that the Sequoia National Forest found suitable in previous planning efforts will continue to be managed as a suitable and recommended wild and scenic river until such time as Congress designates it as an addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. There may be new recommendations that result from the wild and scenic river evaluations currently underway. For the two newly designated wild and scenic rivers on the Inyo National Forest, the revised forest plan would include direction that is applicable to all wild and scenic rivers on the forest and would identify the process and timeline for finishing comprehensive river management plans and developing a final boundary. For rivers with existing comprehensive river management plans, existing management direction is being reviewed to determine if additional updates are needed.

There are three national recreation trails on the Inyo National Forest, two on the Sequoia National Forest outside of the Giant Sequoia National Monument, and five on the Sierra National Forest that will have direction added to the forest plans.

Lands

There is a need to develop plan direction for lands acquired by the Inyo National Forest through the Nevada Enhancement Act.

Monitoring Program

A monitoring program will be developed that meets the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule and informs evaluation of the effectiveness of the revised forest plans. The monitoring program will consist of monitoring questions and associated indicators that address: (1) the status of select watershed conditions; (2) the status of select ecological conditions, including key characteristics, of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems; (3) the status of focal species, selected to assess integrity of ecological systems and effects of management on ecological conditions; (4) the status of a select set of ecological conditions that contribute to the recovery of federally-listed threatened and endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and maintain a viable population of species of conservation concern; (5) the status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives; (6) measurable changes in the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area; (7) progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan; and (8) the effects of each timber management system to determine that it does not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land. The monitoring program may include other monitoring questions and indicators that do not address these eight items, but which nevertheless inform the effectiveness of the plan. Monitoring programs will be designed within the financial and technical capabilities of the forests to implement. Capability will be expanded by coordinating with partners and the broader regional strategy currently under development.

Alternatives to the Proposed Action

Other alternatives will be developed based on significant issues identified during scoping. All alternatives considered will need to address the purpose and need as described above.

Nature of the Decision to Be Made

The EIS process will inform each Forest Supervisor's decision about which alternative best meets the need for quality land management under the 2012 Planning Rule and sustainable multiple-use management, as required by the National Forest Management Act and the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act. This approach seeks to meet the diverse needs of people while protecting the sustainability of forest resources.

The revised forest plans will describe the strategic intent of managing the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests for the next 10 to 15 years. The revised forest plans will identify management and/or geographic areas and use five plan components to guide future project and activity decision-making: desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, and suitability of lands. Each revised plan will also include a monitoring program. Responsible officials will determine whether to make new recommendations for wilderness and other designated areas.

This decision will not authorize project-level activities on the three forests. The authorization of project-level activities on each forest occurs through separate project-specific decision making. The designation of routes, trails, and areas for motorized vehicle travel is not considered during plan revision but addressed in a separate planning process on each forest. Certain issues (e.g., hunting regulations), although important, are beyond the authority or control of the three forests and will not be considered. In addition, some decisions and determinations, such as wild and scenic river suitability determinations, may not be undertaken at this time but addressed in separate processes.

Public Comment Opportunity

We are seeking your comments on the proposed action to revise the forest plans for the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests. Please review the proposed action and send your comments to us so they may be considered in developing issues, developing alternatives, and analyzing those alternatives. We invite you to provide any substantive comments you might have regarding this proposed action. Substantive comments are those that are within the scope of the purpose and need for forest plan revision and the decision to be made, and are specific to the management direction proposed for the three early adopter forests. Please provide supporting reasons for us to consider.

The Forest Service will accept comments on the proposed action for forest plan revision for 30 days, following publication of the Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register. In addition, a notice will be published in the applicable newspapers of record (Inyo Register, Porterville Recorder, and Fresno Bee). However, the publication date of the NOI in the Federal Register is the official beginning of the scoping comment period.

It is the commenter's responsibility to ensure timely receipt of comments. Comments can be made easily on the forest plan revision webpage: <http://tinyurl.com/r5earlyadopters>. Please

indicate if your comments are specific to all forests or are only specific to the Inyo, Sequoia, or Sierra National Forest. Electronic, e-mailed, written, facsimile, and hand-delivered comments will be accepted as well. Comments submitted with an e-mail message must be in a format such as plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx), or Adobe Portable Document Format (.pdf), and can be sent to r5planrevision@fs.fed.us with Subject: **Forest Plan Revision**. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. Written comments should be mailed to: Maria Ulloa, Forest Plan Revision, 1839 So. Newcomb Street, Porterville, CA 93257.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will become part of the public record for this project. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered. However, anonymous comments will not give the Forest Service the ability to provide these commenters with any subsequent analysis and decision documents. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for objection eligibility.

The decisions to approve the revised forest plans will be subject to the objection process identified in 36 CFR 219 Subpart B (219.50 to 219.62). According to 36 CFR 219.53(a), those who may file an objection are individuals and entities who have submitted substantive formal comments related to a plan revision during the opportunities provided for public comment during the planning process. Individuals or representatives of an entity submitting comments must sign the comments or verify identity upon request.

The forest plan revision team plans to hold the following public meetings during the scoping period:

6:00-8:00pm - Monday, September 15, Sierra National Forest, Holiday Inn, 5090 East Clinton Way, Fresno, CA

6:00-8:00pm - Tuesday, September 16, Sequoia National Forest, Supervisor's Office, 1839 South Newcomb Street, Porterville, CA

6:00-8:00pm - Thursday, September 18, Inyo National Forest, Tri-County Fairgrounds, Sierra Street & Fair Drive, Bishop, CA

Estimated Plan Revision Timeline

- Dec 2013 – Notice to Initiate plan revision published in the Federal Register.
- Aug 2014 – Notice of Intent published in the Federal Register and 30-day scoping process starts.
- Sep 2014 – Tribal Forums and Public Workshops.
- Nov 2014 – Tribal Forums and Public Workshops.
- Apr 2015 – Notice of Availability of a draft EIS published in the Federal Register and 90-day public comment period starts.
- May 2015 – Tribal Forums and Public Workshops.
- Mar 2016 – Notice of Availability of a final EIS published in the Federal Register and 60-day objection filing period starts.
- Sep 2016 – Final decisions signed by Forest Supervisors.

If you have any questions, please direct them to Mike Dietl at (707) 562-9121, or e-mail: michaeldietl@fs.fed.us. Information is also available at: <http://tinyurl.com/r5earlyadopters>.

Your comments are important to us and will help develop revised forest plans for the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests.

Sincerely,



EDWARD E. ARMENTA
Forest Supervisor
Inyo National Forest



KEVIN B. ELLIOTT
Forest Supervisor
Sequoia National Forest



DEAN A. GOULD
Forest Supervisor
Sierra National Forest

Enclosures:

Proposed Action
Location Map